



# MEXICAN WOLF RECOVERY PROGRAM PROJECT UPDATE

*July 16, 1999 - February 24, 2000*

## **Purpose of this Update**

This update provides the interested public with current information about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program.

## **Reintroduction Program**

As of February 20, there are 204 total Mexican wolves in the world, of which 7 are in three packs free-ranging in the Apache and Gila National Forests. Since spring 1998, there have been 35 Mexican wolves released, 7 wild-born pups, 10 mortalities, and 5 more are presumed dead (1 adult, 4 pups).

### *Campbell Blue Pack (CB) (M166, F482)*

The CB pair had been self-sufficient and doing well since their December 1998 release in the Strayhorse area. On October 27, F482 was found dead. An examination by the Fish and Wildlife Service's (USFWS) National Forensics Laboratory revealed a broken neck vertebra and puncture wounds, suggesting bites from a mountain lion. Law Enforcement investigations sustained that there was no evidence of human-caused mortality.

On November 30, F522 was transferred from Ladder Ranch to the Engineer Springs pen as a new mate for M166. The pair was released on January 5. Upon release, F522 visited a hunter's camp. She was recaptured and returned to the pen until after the hunting season. She was re-released on February 6 and immediately frequented two ranches and began interacting with dogs. She was captured again on February 16. Due to her nuisance behavior, the decision was made to permanently remove her from the wild.

On February 19, F518 (a genetically valuable



wolf from the Ghost Ranch lineage) was transferred from the Sevilleta facility to the Engineer Springs pen as a new mate for M166. Two of F518's pups (f582, f584) were transferred as well. Efforts are currently in place to capture M166 to place him in the pen to encourage pair-bonding.

### *Hawks Nest Pack (HN) (M131, F486, + pups 600, 601, 602 - genders unknown)*

The HN pack continues to explore the Campbell Blue area where they were released and to extend their home range. The pack has been self-sufficient for several months. The adults and two pups have been observed pursuing and eating native prey.

### *Gavilan Pack (GP) (M183, F168, m555, + pups m582, m583, m584, f585, m586)*

Through planned disturbance and placement of supplemental feed, field personnel successfully moved the GP to the Maple Peak area away from Coalson Peak where the pack was involved with three confirmed cattle depredations. Seven members of the pack then traveled into NM and were involved in 2 more confirmed depredations. Because of the depredations, the pack was returned to captivity with the exception of two wolves: yearling m555, who dispersed from the pack and was not involved in the last two

depredations, and m586 who was last sighted with the pack on October 31 and is presumed dead. The alpha male will not be returned to the wild; however, no decision has been made regarding the future of the other pack members.

Yearling m555 has been located in the Gila National Forest in New Mexico in the Snow Lake area and around Collins Park. It has been difficult to monitor his movements because he is ranging extensively.

*Mule Pack (MP) (M190, F189, + pups m578, f579, m580, m581)*

The MP, released near Rousensock Canyon, moved south into the Four Bar Mesa area where the Pipestem Pack (PS) resided. Both MP adults were captured in traps set to capture the PS F191 in September. They were thin at the time of capture and project personnel re-initiated supplemental feeding. On January 6, the MP was found eating on the carcass of a horse which investigation determined they did not kill. The decision was made however, to move them to an area with more native prey.

All members of the MP were captured except m579 and m581, who are presumed dead due to consistent sightings revealing only four wolves in the pack. During capture efforts, F189 sustained a trap injury which led to the eventual amputation of her leg. The pack of four is currently at Sevilleta and will be released when F189 recovers.

*Pipestem Pack (PS)(M208, F191, f562, f624, m627, f628 all in captivity)*

A total of six pups were born in the wild to the Pipestem pair. In July and August, the alpha male, yearling, and five pups were captured and placed at the Sevilleta facility after depredating cattle. Three of the pups died from canine parvovirus contracted in the wild. Parvovirus is a contagious, viral disease of both domestic and wild canines that is often fatal in young pups. F191 and the sixth pup were captured in December and were reunited with their pack at Sevilleta. Relocation sites for the Pipestem Pack in Arizona and New Mexico are being evaluated.

## **Closures**

Forest closures of approximately one-mile radius are established during the time that wolves occupy acclimation pens, and also may be in effect around den sites when necessary. There is currently a closure in effect around the Engineer Springs Pen in the Strayhorse area.

## **Wolf/Prey Interactions**

Three of the five packs have been self-sufficient during this reporting period. Since July 16, biologists have investigated six native prey items fed upon by wolves: five elk (2 adults, 3 calves - all females), and the skinned-out remains of a bear killed by hunters.

## **Wolf/Human Interactions**

No wolf/human interactions were documented during this reporting period.

## **Wolf/Livestock and Wolf/Pet Interactions**

Five depredations of cattle by the Gavilan Pack were confirmed between August 9, 1999 and January 12, 2000. All occurred on adult cattle (including four cows and one bull), on two allotments, and were referred to the Defenders of Wildlife Compensation Program representative.

The Gavilan Pack is the second pack confirmed to have depredated livestock since January 1998. All released wolves were located within allotments containing livestock, including cows with calves present.

CB F522 frequented two ranches and was interacting with dogs. No dogs were injured. She was permanently removed from the wild and placed in captivity.

## **Interagency Coordination**

On August 25, project staff participated in a Common Ground Planning Workshop involving community leaders, agencies, and environmental organizations. The workshop was hosted by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS) Clifton Ranger District.

.The USFS Glenwood Ranger District has provided office space and technical support to Field Coordinator Wendy Brown during a detail in Glenwood. On November 18, the District also hosted the eighth meeting of the Interagency Management Advisory Group.

### **Outreach**

The USFWS recently distributed the Environmental Assessment (EA) for the *Translocation of Mexican Wolves Throughout the Blue Range Wolf Recovery Area in Arizona and New Mexico* in which the proposed action involves the translocation of wolves for management purposes which were previously released in the Primary Recovery Zone of the BRWRA. The USFWS invites you to provide comment on this proposed action and related effects. To receive a copy of the EA, please contact the USFWS at the address provided on page 5 of this update. Copies are also available at Forest Service offices of the Gila National Forest in Silver City, Reserve, and Mimbres, New Mexico. Public comment will be accepted through **March 15, 2000**.

During this comment period, two public hearings will be conducted:

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| March 1, 2000<br>7:00 - 9:00 p.m. | Reserve, NM<br>Community Center                                   |
| March 2, 2000<br>7:00 - 9:00 p.m. | Silver City, NM<br>Western NM University<br>Light Hall Auditorium |

- ! The Mexican Wolf Interagency Reporting Hotline, **1-888-459-WOLF (9653)**, is operational to report sightings, harassment, or taking of Mexican wolves, or to report livestock depredation.
- ! Field updates are provided approximately every two weeks on the USFWS Mexican wolf web page <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov>
- ! One-page updates for local residents in Alpine, Springerville, and Clifton Arizona

are posted regularly in various public places, such as post offices, libraries, and USFS offices. They are also being provided to local newspapers in Springerville and Reserve.

- ! Large signs providing information on wolf reintroduction and recommendations to minimize wolf/human conflicts are posted at strategic locations throughout the Apache National Forest and at major roads and trail heads entering the Apache-Sitgreaves National Forest from the Gila National Forest in New Mexico.

The Catron County Citizens Committee in Reserve, New Mexico invited wolf project staff to their meetings in September, November, and December. Presentations and discussions have occurred on the following issues: general wolf project implementation; the processes under consideration regarding translocating wolves to New Mexico; and the depredation investigation and compensation programs.

Project staff participated in an informaiton meeting hosted by the Gila Rod and Gun Club on January 25 in Solver City.

The wolf project has participated in several major community events including the Apache County Fair, the New Mexico State Fair, National Wildlife Refuge Week, and the Festival of Cranes.

Project staff made numerous presentations to educational institutions, civic groups, and non-profit organizations and conducted many media interviews. We continue to be available for presentations to civic groups, non-profit organizations, and educational institutions.

### **Non-Government Partnership Activities**

A total of 41 facilities (30 in the U.S. and 11 in Mexico) participate in the Mexican wolf captive-breeding program. The Ladder Ranch and the Sevilleta facility, both in New Mexico, and Wolf Haven International in Washington manage Mexican wolves for pre-acclimation release

purposes. All cooperating captive management facilities manage Mexican wolves at their own cost.

Defenders of Wildlife continues to offer reimbursement to ranchers for confirmed losses of livestock.

Prescott College students volunteered their time on September 21 and 22. The students assisted with a bulk mailing to hunters in Units 1 and 27, finished taking down the Turkey Creek acclimation pen, and cleaned and disinfected the area where the pups had died from canine parvovirus.

Pinetop, AZ Boy Scouts assisted on September 24 with a bulk mailing to hunters in Units 1 and 27.

The Wild Canid Survival and Research Center hosted the Second Annual Mexican Wolf Keeper Workshop in Eureka, MO on October 22-23.

Eagle Scouts constructed six den boxes and delivered them on October 29 to the Sevilleta facility.

Steve Crozier led a crew including staff from Bosque del Apache National Wildlife Refuge to assemble a pen at Sevilleta in December. The pen provides much needed additional space for wolves.

### **Captive Population Update**

There are currently 197 Mexican wolves in the captive population (47 in Mexico, 150 in US), of those 37 are surviving pups of 1999.

The 1999 Mexican Wolf Species Survival Plan (SSP) meeting was held in Mexico City on August 2-4. Colleen Buchanan, USFWS Wolf Biologist, and Bryan Arroyo, Program Assistant Regional Director - Ecological Services, attended. Both Mexico and the United States reaffirmed their commitment to the bi-national endangered species recovery effort, and outlined

the following for the year 2000:

- α Determined wolf pairings, transfers, and discussed husbandry issues.
- α Established 23 breeding pairs: 11 in the US and 12 in Mexico.
- α Identified 10 potential release candidate pairs to be housed at three pre-acclimation facilities: Sevilleta Wolf Management facility, Ladder Ranch, and Wolf Haven.

M574 was transferred from Rio Grande Zoo to Sevilleta on November 19. He is the first Aragon x McBride-cross considered as a future release candidate and brings valuable genetic diversity to the captive release pool.

### **Litigation**

After reviewing both sides' arguments and the government's final environmental impact statement and administrative record, Judge Mecham dismissed with prejudice the New Mexico Cattle Growers' Association, et al. lawsuit concerning the release of Mexican wolves bred and raised in captivity into National forest lands located in Arizona and New Mexico. The court ruled on October 28 that the FWS complied with NEPA, ESA and the APA regarding the final rule for the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program. The plaintiffs have filed an appeal.

In August, the court upheld the U.S. Forest Service decision to allow the use of helicopters to move Mexican wolves to specific sites within the Blue Range Primitive Area (BRPA).

### **Personnel**

David Parsons, Mexican Wolf Recovery Leader, retired on September 30. Dave's leadership, with a steady hand, good mind, and unlimited perseverance has guided all aspects of the program for over nine years. Dave cannot be thanked enough, and is sorely missed. We have no doubt of his continued success and contributions to conservation.

Wendy Brown, USFWS Wolf Biologist, began a temporary detail in Glenwood, New Mexico.

New employees on the project include Stephanie Naftal and Alexis Watts, who have been hired as Arizona Game and Fish Department technicians.

Paul Frame, Paul Morey, Tim Peltier, and Janet Reed have completed their terms or left the project to pursue other interests.

### **Life in Wolf Country**

The following letter is the second submission to this feature of our newsletter. We encourage individuals living within or near the wolf recovery area to share their experiences and insights with other readers. We hope that this will foster open discussion of important issues and concerns of local residents.

The guidelines for your article:

1. Be respectful of other and their views.
2. Please keep it 250 words or less in length.

We will publish your article verbatim, unless it deviates from the guidelines. If we must edit your article, we will do our best to retain its original intent. This update reaches over 3,000 people throughout the United States and several foreign countries who have expressed an interest in remaining informed about the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program. This is your chance to share useful information, voice your opinion and ideas, stimulate debate, or make suggestions to project managers. *Please submit your articles to either of the two addresses below by **May 1, 2000**.* We look forward to hearing from you.

*Good day,*

*In keeping within the guidelines for the "Life in Wolf Country" articles, I will try not to be disrespectful of others and their views. All I'm asking for in this letter is clarification on a point that is confusing to me.*

*The April-July 1999 issue of the Mexican Wolf Recovery Program's "Project Update Newsletter" stated that the New Mexico*

*Cattle Growers Association is suing the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service against the Mexican Wolf reintroduction project. Several cows and dogs were injured by wolves, and one confirmed killing of a cow by a wolf occurred on July 11. Defenders of Wildlife has been offering ranchers reimbursement for any losses suffered due to conflicts between wolves and ranchers' cattle and dogs. Now, this seems very fair to me.*

*My questions therefore are these: What are the ranchers complaining about? Do they want more money? Are they asking that the states of Arizona and New Mexico be rendered safe habitats for cattle, and only for cattle? What more are Americans willing to sacrifice for the almighty hamburger?*

*Perhaps, as a person who appreciates wilderness and the diversity of creatures great and small who inhabit it, I should consider suing the New Mexico Cattle Growers Association. My interest? Helping to insure diversity of life, freedom, the right to live, and the right to see a wolf in its natural environment and not in a zoo. Simple.*

*Sincerely,  
Dom DiToro*

### **Information Materials**

Informational materials are available through our web site <http://mexicanwolf.fws.gov> or contact us at the addresses below. We welcome your ideas about our written communications, our general outreach efforts, and any specific suggestions you have about how to improve the *Project Update*.

Mexican Wolf Recovery Leader  
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service  
P.O. Box 1306  
Albuquerque, NM 87103

Or

Regional Nongame Specialist  
Arizona Game and Fish Department  
HC 66 Box 57201  
Pinetop, AZ 85935

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